

**The Local Government Ombudsman's
Annual Letter**

**City of Bradford Metropolitan
District Council**

**for the year ended
31 March 2008**

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) provides a free, independent and impartial service. We consider complaints about the administrative actions of councils and some other authorities. We cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. If we find something has gone wrong, such as poor service, service failure, delay or bad advice, and that a person has suffered as a result, the Ombudsmen aim to get it put right by recommending a suitable remedy. The LGO also uses the findings from investigation work to help authorities provide better public services through initiatives such as special reports, training and annual letters.

Annual Letter 2007/08 - Introduction

This annual letter provides a summary of the complaints received about Bradford Metropolitan District and comments on the authority's performance and complaint-handling arrangements.

I hope that the letter will assist you in improving services by providing a useful perspective on how some people who are dissatisfied experience or perceive your services.

Two attachments form an integral part of this letter: statistical data covering a three year period and a note to help the interpretation of the statistics.

Complaints received

During the year my office received 83 complaints against the Council which marks a significant reduction [24%] when compared with the previous year when complaints totalled 112. The Council will, I am sure, take some comfort from this. I draw no conclusions from this reduction in the number of complaints received but I do note that the number of complaints I received in the year about planning and building control matters fell from 44 in 2006/2007 to 25 in 2007/2008. Such complaints though remain the largest single category of all complaints made although having comprised a little under 40% of complaints received in the previous year they comprised just under 30% in this year.

Liaison with the Local Government Ombudsman

I remain very happy with the working relationship between your office and my investigative staff. I ask for responses from all authorities to reach my office within 28 calendar days and although the Council failed to meet this target overall [averaging 30.9 days] I am happy with the efforts made by officers to respond as quickly as possible. I commend the Council for ensuring that enquiries about education admission appeal complaints were dealt with and sent back to me in a fraction under 13 days. The Council recognises the urgency which attaches to these complaints and the willingness to respond so quickly reflects well on the Council.

Decisions on complaints

Reports and local settlements

We will often discontinue enquires into a complaint when a council takes or agrees to take action that we consider to be a satisfactory response – we call these local settlements. In 2007/08 the Local Government Ombudsmen determined 27% of complaints by local settlement (excluding 'premature' complaints - where councils have not had a proper chance to deal with them - and those outside our jurisdiction). If an investigation is completed I issue a public report.

I issued one report about the Council during the year. I found that the Council, in considering the likely impact of a domestic extension upon the amenity of near neighbours, failed to follow the statutory procedure, failed properly to notify the affected neighbours and failed to record a visit made to the site by officers and failed to demonstrate that any consideration had been given to the merits of the planning application. The Council accepted my recommendation that it should pay compensation to the complainants.

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Your Council's complaints procedure and handling of complaints

As with last year I am happy to report that no issues have arisen during the year to suggest that there are any problems with the way in which the Council handles complaints made to it by the public.

Training in complaint handling

Part of our role is to provide advice and guidance about good administrative practice. We offer training courses for all levels of local authority staff in complaints handling and investigation. A detailed evaluation of the training provided to councils over the past three years shows very high levels of satisfaction.

The range of courses is expanding in response to demand. In addition to Good Complaint Handling (identifying and processing complaints) and Effective Complaint Handling (investigation and resolution) we now offer these courses specifically for social services staff and a course on reviewing complaints for social care review panel members. We will customise courses to meet your Council's specific requirements and provide courses for groups of staff from different smaller authorities.

Participants benefit from the complaint-handling knowledge and expertise of the experienced investigators who present the courses.

I enclose information on the full range of courses available together with contact details for enquiries and any further bookings.

LGO developments

We launched the LGO Advice Team in April, providing a first contact service for all enquirers and new complainants. Demand for the service has been high. Our team of advisers, trained to provide comprehensive information and advice, has dealt with many thousands of calls since the service started.

The team handles complaints submitted by telephone, email or text, as well as in writing. This new power to accept complaints other than in writing was one of the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, which also came into force in April. Our experience of implementing other provisions in the Act, such as complaints about service failure and apparent maladministration, is being kept under review and will be subject to further discussion. Any feedback from your Council would be welcome.

Last year we published two special reports providing advice and guidance on 'applications for prior approval of telecommunications masts' and 'citizen redress in local partnerships'. Feedback on special reports is always welcome. I would particularly appreciate information on complaints protocols in the governance arrangements of partnerships with which your Council is involved.

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Conclusions and general observations

I welcome this opportunity to comment on our experience of complaints about the Council over the past year. I hope that you find the information and assessment provided useful when seeking improvements to your Council's services.

**Anne Seex
Local Government Ombudsman
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June 2008

Enc: Statistical data
Note on interpretation of statistics
Leaflet on training courses (with posted copy only)

Complaints received by subject area	Adult care services	Benefits	Children and family services	Education	Housing	Other	Planning & building control	Public finance	Social Services - other	Transport and highways	Total
01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008	4	3	8	8	6	14	25	5	0	10	83
2006 / 2007	8	5	8	7	1	22	44	5	0	12	112
2005 / 2006	10	6	4	17	4	15	47	1	2	9	115

Note: these figures will include complaints that were made prematurely to the Ombudsman and which we referred back to the authority for consideration.

Decisions	MI reps	LS	M reps	NM reps	No mal	Omb disc	Outside jurisdiction	Premature complaints	Total excl premature	Total
01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008	1	16	0	0	29	23	11	24	80	104
2006 / 2007	0	20	1	0	30	9	14	33	74	107
2005 / 2006	1	6	0	0	41	9	7	36	64	100

See attached notes for an explanation of the headings in this table.

Response times	FIRST ENQUIRIES	
	No. of First Enquiries	Avg no. of days to respond
01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008	41	30.9
2006 / 2007	35	32.9
2005 / 2006	65	32.0

Average local authority response times 01/04/2007 to 31/03/2008

Types of authority	<= 28 days %	29 - 35 days %	>= 36 days %
District Councils	56.4	24.6	19.1
Unitary Authorities	41.3	50.0	8.7
Metropolitan Authorities	58.3	30.6	11.1
County Councils	47.1	38.2	14.7
London Boroughs	45.5	27.3	27.3
National Park Authorities	71.4	28.6	0.0